

giving VOICE

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INTRICACY AND BALANCE

Recently my congregation gathered for a retreat that centered around the theme of the “Sacred Web of Life.” Inevitably, the conversation led at one point to a discussion of community, a topic which often evokes a variety of emotions in many of our sisters, especially those who have painful memories of forced communal living in large, sometimes unhealthy groups. The challenge, being presented to us now, is to reexamine our call to live communally; to me the theme of this retreat seems to perfect backdrop for a discussion of communal living.



The ecosystem of our planet is a carefully constructed community, with each member having a role to play in the functioning of the overall “web of life.” The balance and interconnection between each member is also very intricately fashioned as too much or too little of one variable can change the dynamics of the whole ecosystem.

In the same way, the communities, in which we live out our call to religious life, are carefully constructed and delicately balanced, though we might not see them in this way as we live in the messiness of everyday life. The gifts that each member offers to the community reflect the intricacy of our shared lives, as one is better at fixing the computer and another is handier with tools and yet all of our gifts are valued and they contribute to the greater good of the whole. Just as our individual lives reflect a balance between the many aspects of who we are and what we do -- prayer, ministry, relationships -- so too are our communal lives a reflection of this balance. We know from experience that when one aspect of our personal lives is taking too much time or attention, it leaves the whole person out of balance. In the same way, when one aspect of our communal lives is either deficient or drawing too much energy from us, our communal lives are unbalanced.

The Fourth National Giving Voice Conference, held in June in Milwaukee addressed the topic of “Living Community in the 21st Century”. The sisters gathered reflected on their own experiences of living community: of the intricacy, messiness and balance of life shared with others. They also found support, forged relationships and learned helpful tools for the journey. Several sisters who were present at the gathering have offered their reflections either on living community in the 21st century or their experience of the conference. It is our sincere hope that their reflections will stir your own thoughts and spark conversations on what living community means in religious life today.

Enjoy,
Joanne Koehl, SC
Newsletter Editor

living community

Longings for Community

By Teresa Maya, ccvi

“Community” has been a source of constant reflection, struggle and surprise in my journey as a religious. Before finally giving in and deciding I needed to try this life, in order to appease my increasingly anxious “call”, I had a conversation with a Dominican friend and mentor. I was groping desperately for the “right question” so that I would have the clarity I so desperately needed to make this controversial decision. I am not sure my question was the most defining but I have come back to it over the years and the answer is still the same. I asked her, “What is the best and the worst thing about religious life?” And her simple answer came with a knowing smile, “it’s the same answer for both: community life.” As I reflect back on that conversation, I do not remember being particularly impressed... I had been expecting something else, celibacy or obedience perhaps. But today, as I recount the steps, remember the places, and recall the faces, I finally agree.

There may be theological debates that are central to religious life, but I am certain that nothing has taken up more of my time, in prayer or conversation, than my day to day living in community. Not the spiritual dimension of communion or its relationship to the Trinity, but the simple ordinary challenge of living with my local community. Looking back on the “best of times and the worst of times”, I realize with humility that my experience of community has always been directly related to the measure of my personal investment in it. The times when I have given myself to the life of the community – to really listening for what is necessary, to suggesting or being creative about our daily life, to staying and being there for the rest of the Sisters – have always been the best. The most difficult times have been the ones when my center has shifted, and I have focused on myself: my ministry needs, free time, or “space”. In both cases, so many names come to mind: names of holy and wise sisters, mentors in whose debt I will be forever; names of difficult women, that often made me wonder in chapel whether “they” had a vocation. Theological musings cannot help when dealing with a sister who has been this way for years or one who refuses to pray with music. The clay we must mold in the middle of that reality is so much more vulnerable,

so alien to self-help formulas... it’s the stuff of a life that searches for God with others in community, and it is full of light and shadow and so many colors.

I have spent so much time accepting things, as they are, along with the sometimes-painful truth that I can do very little about it, that I had a hard time realizing I actually had longings for community! But I do, they came slowly, gently, and they give substance to my hope. My longings are sustained by my absolute conviction that the Christian story cannot be told without community. We were baptized into this truth, we consecrated our life to this truth, and we minister to this truth. What does this community of my longings look like? First, I think religious communities have to become places of

conversation, of authentic, deep-listening conversation, the kind that happens over morning coffee where we share as women of the Word. Only then can we transcend the generations, the theologies, and the idiosyncrasies that separate us to find what has always united us. For this kind of conversation to happen, our communities also need to be places of wholeness, where we can be human, tired, sick, or lonely, where we can heal and grow as fully integrated adults. They need to be communities where we can

love those who are broken and discover that God called us to be whole.

Finally, I need to believe that our communities can be places of joy. So much of our conversation around community involves frustration, trials and lots of tribulation, but in the end our daily living of community needs to have joy! Why else would any of us stay? Why else would anyone come? What other response could we possibly give to the extraordinary love of God for each one of us? We need to examine our experience of joy in community closely, we need to discover it around us and bring it about, we need to nourish and sustain it with prayer, reconciliation, patience, and the undying hope that God wants this for all of us. Our communities need to be places of joy- the kind that stays despite the trivial, the kind that warms the heart and brings that knowing smile my Dominican friend had when she answered my questions. “The answer is simple” she said, “community life”.

*Our
communities
can be places
of joy.*

LIVING COMMUNITY RATHER THAN BEING IN COMMUNITY

By Edna Pearl Esquibel, CSSF

“I love religious life and believe in it’s future.” This conference t-shirt slogan captured the message I received from the 2009 National Giving Voice Conference in Milwaukee, WI. The group processed our shared pain, confusion, disappointment and joy of being a younger religious sister in the 21st century. The end result was the overwhelming gratitude and acknowledgement that God had called us for a purpose and would sustain us through it. The varieties of ministries through which, the participating sisters serve God’s people demonstrated that religious life in the US today is stepping forward to meet the needs of the time.

In this encounter between our congregational charisms and the needs of today’s world, we must focus on the truths that were at the core of each of our foundings. Foremost is the continual struggle, individually and communally, to prioritize quality time with our Lord in prayer: the source that allows us to be of service in the first place. Through prayer we will keep our focus on our One True Love and then be able to take the loving relationship our God offers us and give it back as heaven for the world.

Living community is counter-cultural in the United States today. People make commitments and break them at least half of the time. Different viewpoints, outlooks on life, and visions for the future tear apart family and social structures. In an *intentional community* the choice is to support each other even though there are differences. In the deliberate choice to relate as sister to others is found the knowledge that together we are part of something greater than we could ever be individually. It is also a willingness to be a public witness both corporately and individually.

Regardless of the title *sister*, we are all broken, imperfect human beings. “Transformation cannot take place alone. The glory of being fully human and fully alive is meant to be broken open in community life. Living community is an opportunity through our witness to transform ourselves, those around us, and our world.” To *live community* rather than *be in community* we must rely on each other to know and grow closer to our God and to draw each other back from the wrong path. It is only then that we can connect with those with whom we live, serve, and witness; like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that fit together. Even before it is complete, anyone who sees it will recognize the glorious picture being created and give honor and praise to God for such beauty and harmony.

The future calls us to be sister, to live community inter-congregationally, to gain strength from each other, to continue forward on the journey our founders began by following the footsteps of Christ Jesus, and to do so with joyful hearts filled with hope.

THE VOICES OF YOUNGER WOMEN RELIGIOUS

giving VOICE

Giving Voice is a newsletter in which the articles are written by women religious under 50. The primary purpose of *Giving Voice* is to promote networking, dialogue and support among this generation of sisters. The secondary purpose is to promote intergenerational dialogue. We welcome comments from sisters over 50 who wish to support and dialogue with their younger members.

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By joining the Giving Voice Email List, you can receive regular updates on Giving Voice news. Sign up on the Giving Voice website (www.giving-voice.org).

Editorial Policies

Items for publication can be submitted email. The author’s name, congregational initials, and city/state/country of residence must also be included. Please also indicate whether it is permissible to publish your email in *Giving Voice* so our readers can network with you if they wish to do so. The Editorial Team reserves the right to edit letters and articles for length and appropriateness. Some items may not be published due to space limitations. Items for publication must be received by the deadline to be included in a particular issue of *Giving Voice*. Submit items for publication to *Giving Voice* at editor@giving-voice.org.

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE - MILWAUKEE, WI



living community

In Between the Not Anymore and the Not Yet

by Susan Francois, CSJP

When we gathered on Thursday, June 11th at Alverno College, Luisa Saffiotti shared a beautiful photograph of a butterfly going through three stages of transformation at the same time. Hanging onto the branch by a thin thread, the transformation is almost complete. The butterfly is coming out, but has not yet opened its wings to fly. The larva, the cocoon, are still there. The picture shows both the beauty and the messiness of the dying, the transformation and the birthing. "What does it mean when all three are occurring at the same time," Luisa asked us. "What is it like to be with the not anymore and the not yet?"

I don't know about anyone else gathered in the conference center that night, but I was floored. Luisa had put words and image to the questions and movements of my own heart as I reflected on my deepest longings for living community in the 21st Century. I find myself in my present day reality as a temporary professed Sister of St. Joseph of Peace, grateful for my life in community as it is now. But I also know that it will not stay this way. Just as life in community today is not what it was for our Sisters in decades past, our future in religious life will be different as well. The only thing is, we really have no idea what it will become.

I have deep longings for the "not yet" of community. There are a few women in my community who are within ten to 15 years of me on either side. And it seems others are coming, both to my Congregation and to yours. Gathering with other younger religious at Giving Voice gives me even more confidence that religious life has a future—even if we don't know what it looks like.

What my heart tells me is that when I am in my 50s, 60s, and 70s, we will be smaller, but also freer. Freer to live our charisms more deeply and less institutionally. Freer to be more creative about what we even mean by living community. Freer to cooperate more across congregational lines and with the larger church and world. When I dream of *that* future, I feel both blessed and challenged to be living religious life at this time in our history. My deepest longing is that together, we can faithfully and creatively live into the "not yet."

To be quite honest, what I am less excited about, although I can imagine it more clearly, is the in between time—the next 10 to 25 years when we say goodbye to so many of our dear friends and wisdom women. As the remnants of the large novitiate classes of the 50s and 60s start to age gracefully, those fewer of us "younger ones" will need to shift to more of a caretaker mode. We will be caretakers not only for these women we love deeply, but caretakers of the dreams, passions, charisms and very future of religious life.

My deepest longing for this in between time is that we—those gathered at Alverno and our friends at home—can be community to each other *across* congregational lines. How can we support each other as we hold onto the dreams, passions and desires that led us to religious life and our Congregations in the first place? How can we be present to each other in the process of Luisa's image—as we experience the dyings, the transformations and the birthings at the same time?

Something that I can only describe as "of God" happened at Alverno College. We shared our deepest longings and dreamed together. But we also grieved, laughed, and cried together. Over and over again, women got up to the microphone to express their feelings of being blessed. Blessed to be here at *this* time—to carry the stories and the life into the future. Grateful for the women with whom they have shared community. Unsure of the future, but filled with hope and a love both of God and religious life.

The context is certainly different, but I am reminded of something I read once by Jon Sobrino, SJ:

"Where then, is the hope? Precisely in those who remember the witness of the martyrs and take it to heart, bearing the cross they bore and struggling as they did to create a world in which the poor have life and dignity. ... [Remembering] exhorts us to live more for one another and provokes us to a commitment to truth, peace and justice. It compels us to be more human. It maintains hope in the midst of so much enchantment."

Sobrino of course was reflecting on his experiences in El Salvador, where he narrowly escaped being martyred himself. If we reflect on his words in terms of the women who have gone before us, however, we begin to see what it is like to live in this in between time. If we remember and witness to their lives, take them to heart, and continue on to create a world in which the poor have life and dignity, we too will be compelled to live more for one another. To be more human. To maintain hope, no matter how crazy it may seem. If we are faithful to what has gone before, if we honor the beauty and the messiness of the transformation, the butterfly will come out of its cocoon. And it will fly.



HOW IS COMMUNITY LIFE AFFECTING ME?

By Dina Bato

I entered the postulancy of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in September 2008, and though I mentally knew that there aren't many Sisters close to my own age nearby, I didn't realize how that was going to impact me. In coming to terms with that reality, I felt a certain sense of anxiety, a sense of "Oh, man! What am I going to do?" Bringing my thoughts and concerns to my director, I was advised to "not get old before [my] time," to articulate my needs, and to actively seek out what could fill those needs in a life-giving fashion.

Coming home to the motherhouse throughout the year, I've found loving support from the community in the fostering of my spiritual growth and the enhancing of my worldview. However, sometimes I have found it difficult to articulate my need for social interaction, to have a "32 day" versus a "73 day". Sometimes opportunities have come where I can let loose and intermingle with people within my generation around the Woods (plus or minus a decade or two), but for the most part, they have been staff persons who work for the Sisters or full-time volunteers who serve in the Sisters' ministries. I've also been blessed with opportunities to visit with family members who live a few hours away from the Woods. In these interactions, though, actually delving into the question of "how is community life affecting me" has seldom come up.

When discussions concerning "canned rhetoric," hopes and fears, and diminishing numbers within communities were vocalized at the conference, my hidden fear of "losing myself" within the community surfaced to the forefront of my mind. I appreciated the open mike opportunities where people gave voice to some of the same frustrations I have living with older Sisters. I also found the various tools we were given for developing and sustaining life-giving community to be very helpful. The Emmaus walk helped as well; as in that experience we were given the opportunity to share our personal stories and some of our frustrations regarding living in community with each other. What struck me was the call to be intentional, persistent, and real in finding community, within the congregation *and* without, and to personalize the experience, rather than making the experience "what it should be like."

Also at the conference, I found it reassuring that I'm not in a "boat by myself." It was very refreshing to be able to let loose with other women religious, which is something I don't think I've ever comfortably had, either before or after entering community. I felt comfortable to be myself around the younger Sisters at the conference, which challenges me to not be afraid to be myself within my own community. This, for me, solidifies the saying that "Nuns Rock."

Obstacles & Opportunities in Community

By Sarah Kohles, OSF

I have lived "in community" for six years and have lived in five different places during this time. For the past two years, I have been geographically far from most of my Sisters, living and working with one other Sister. This is my first experience of living with someone older than my grandmother for an extended period of time.

As I reflected on the obstacles and opportunities in living community, I found myself centering in on the fact that for me the obstacles and opportunities are one and the same. We can name many obstacles to living community—differences in age, culture, personalities, definitions of 'community,' as well as the amount of moving around that happens in initial formation, our busy lives, society's lack of support for the vows, and the list could go on and on.

In my experience each of these obstacles are also opportunities for living community. For example, the Sister I live with and I are different in many ways, yet we get along well and are committed to living community. One difficulty we've encountered has been 'faith sharing'. It's easy for the deeper sharing of where we find God each day to slip through the cracks when we have

such busy lives. It has taken us awhile to find a regular pattern for this level of deeper sharing. Yet, we are both committed to it, to staying in relationship, to finding God in the day-to-day experience of life together and in our ministry. For me, this makes every challenge and obstacle worth it.

Catherine Whitmire recalls an African proverb: "Two antelopes walk together so that they might blow the dust from each others eyes."

In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul says that we are all gazing at the very glory of God, and that we are being transformed into what we look at. Community transforms us. When we stay in relationship, when we search for God in the other, we are transformed into what we see—the very glory of God. It is my Sisters who incarnate God's presence in my life.

In the life of St. Francis of Assisi, it is only when others began to follow him that God's will for his life was revealed. God's will for us is made known in one another—in community. Obstacles or challenges transform us and become opportunities and gifts. All is gift!

Opportunities and Obstacles

By Patrice Colletti, SDS

I am a Salvatorian Sister. The Salvatorians are a global community of over 4,000 members. We were founded in the 1880s as an apostolic society of men and women, married and single, lay and clerical, as equal partners and equal collaborators in our mission of proclaiming to all the salvation that comes to the world through Jesus Christ.

The Church wasn't ready for a community of men/women, lay, clerics, married and single... so our founders established a more traditional structure. Today, we are a Salvatorian family including 1200 Sisters in 28 countries (83 in USA); 1100 Priests/Brothers in 33 countries, and over 2000 lay members in a dozen countries.

Why is this context important? One of the obstacles and opportunities of our community- of any community- is how it understands itself: Its self-definition within its ever-changing historical and cultural context.

SELF- UNDERSTANDING:

We are experiencing two simultaneous emerging understandings of ourselves: as a Salvatorian family of equals, and also, at least among the Sisters, an emerging understanding of self as a global community- not simply international, but a worldwide, global community... At the same time, we still think of our selves "provincially", perhaps TOO provincially, when we say "there are 83 members in our community..." when, in reality, there are more than 3000 Salvatorians in over 40 countries, speaking dozens of languages. Yet, we are daughters of our North American culture and times, and we cannot escape that certain self-centered-ness that puts us in the center of a smallish circle while the rest of the world remains outside our immediate horizon for recognition.

This shift in self-understanding is both an obstacle and an opportunity for us, and also forms a context for living community as Salvatorians in the 21st Century. Other obstacles also hold opportunities. These, too, are reflections of our culture and times.

CROSS-GENERATIONAL LIVING:

We live in intergenerational groups. While perhaps our relatives lived in multi-generational households, most of us grew up in nuclear families. Often, our extended

families lived far away, perhaps gathering periodically for holidays. We may have known all four of our grandparents (or more, if we came from a blended family, as many of us do), but rarely did we live in the same home with them. Many of us did not live with both of our parents; some were raised in single-adult households. Nor did our siblings stay at home. We, and they, probably left home for college and then set off on our own, establishing separate dwellings and families. Today's sisters, particularly those who grew up in the United States, generally don't come to community with a well-honed skill set, or mindset, for living with women old enough to be our mothers, grandmothers, and sometimes even great-grandmothers.

DEVELOPMENTALLY NORMAL:

Our experience of cross-generational living offers us many opportunities and challenges. Typically, the women with whom we live, and often, we ourselves, have little understanding of the developmental stages of healthy adulthood. We do not recognize that "normal" for a 20-something, a 30-something, or a 40-something is fundamentally different from the "normal" of those in middle or late middle age or early/active or full retirement. It can't be the same- it should not be the same. Yet, community members often function out of unexplored assumptions that result in "shoulds" about our behaviors and attitudes. We face questions which can even impact our progress through initial formation ("Why are you so identified with your job title instead of your identity as a sister? Why is being productive and

accomplishing great things so darn important to you? Why can't you just "be?"). Our prayer, our contemplation, our social needs, and our involvement in ministry and community might well be "normal" and healthy for women our age, but those with whom we live may hold quite different expectations. Too often, they evaluate us against the norm for their own developmental stage, unaware that what they see of us is what they should be seeing from a healthy, balanced 20, 30 or

40-something woman.

At the same time, we "young sisters" continually call our sisters in community to new perspectives. We are rarely shy about sharing our talents, abilities, energies and experiences. We are courageous and can gently and persistently name the sort of "reverse age-ism" that unconsciously occurs when we are in the minority. We

We "younger sisters" continually call our sisters in community to new perspective.

often come to community with well-developed leadership talents, international and intercultural experiences, and technological expertise, and we yearn for an opportunity to share them with our community “even though” we are yet “young.” We may not have the wisdom of our elders, but often, we do bring a lived wisdom of life experiences, synthesized and reflected upon, that were simply not attainable when Sister Mary Octogenarian was twenty-nine years old.

Moreover, we have some advantages our elders did not. We can use the space of our own initial or ongoing formation to develop our own understanding of adult development. Even if our elders can’t understand what it means to be 20-something, we can learn about the developmental “normal” of being 20, or 60, 70, or 80-something, and gain insights into our own experience of others. We are privileged to live in a time when resources are easily, if not instantaneously, available to us, and when ongoing learning is almost a universally accepted norm in our religious life.

RE-CREATION:

Cross-generational living also calls us to examine the “re-creation” we need to stay healthy and grow. The generational differences in re-creational activities can be profound. We ask “Who wants to go backpacking? Or canoeing? Or for a walk?” We IM and text friends far and near, day or night. We are puzzled by Sister Mary Television, who defines “quality time together” as eating supper, praying the Office, and watching Lawrence Welk together. An exciting Friday night in the convent might even include a round or two of Yahtzee! We discover that we need to take the hike, or go on the camping trip with friends outside our community to reenergize. Wheel of Fortune just doesn’t do it for us. If we do not or cannot find meaningful ways to re-create, we face the challenge and pain of the resulting loneliness in our life.

At the same time, however, we also are offered the gift of aloneness. This is not the same as loneliness. Aloneness can open a space for contemplation and reflective attention to what is really a priority in our life of commitment to God. But, we have to learn how to do this, and often, it is not overtly taught in our initial formation. But, if we can accept the gift of aloneness and make choices to re-create which bring us into circles with others, probably beyond our community, that meet our age-appropriate needs for friendships, activities, and involvement, we can create a healthy balance. And,



who knows, you may discover a seventy-year old who has always yearned to go hang-gliding!

PEERS AND MENTORS:

Even as most of us face the challenges of a lack of chronological peers in our local, or perhaps even extended, community, we also live within a sub-culture of women’s religious life in which mentors and wisdom figures abound. Of course, age does not, by itself, produce wisdom or mentoring ability. But, when we look around, we are almost guaranteed to find women who can generously serve these roles for us. Other women our age simply do not have these opportunities. Many corporate mentoring programs spend big bucks to promote the types of mentoring we can access every day!

We also live in a time when the world becomes smaller and smaller each day. We connect with peers through intercommunity formation groups or ongoing programs, through blogs, email, cell phones, texting, and Twitter.

We harness technology without a second thought, and use it to get to know people anywhere in our world. In many communities, we are active participants in parish, city, or neighborhood activities, including social activities, making friends from every background, socioeconomic group, and culture. These are experiences that were inaccessible or totally unavailable to our elders when they were “our age.” Yet, these also create the formative experiences of our adulthood, and the opportunities we gain create us and shape us for the future of religious life.

Emerging community self-identity, cross-generational living, stages of adult development, re-creation, and peer relationships each present us significant challenges, and amazing opportunities. They are two parts of a whole, and promise us vitality and energy, depth and learning. They may never make it to the level of dinner table dialogue or living room conversation, but these opportunities and obstacles can offer us a critical possibilities for growing deeply into community life in the twenty-first century.

Sister Patrice M. Colletti, SD, is an educator and non-profit leader who was recently elected to serve the Sisters of the Divine Savior as Vicareess of the North American Province. She currently lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Reflections on Community:

A Hope Filled Future

By Shawna Foley, PBVM

Shawna was one of the panelists during the Giving Voice conference. The first piece below is the reflection that she offered in the panel discussion. The second piece contains some further reflections that she wished to share based on her experience at the conference.

I am a Presentation Sister of Fargo, North Dakota. It is a small community, with only 48 Sisters. I am the only one in our community in her thirties; the next youngest sister is in her fifties. With our median age at 76, the generation gap is very evident in our community. I've learned over the years that you cannot plan anything that will go later than 8 p.m. if you want the sisters to be involved, as it is too late for many of them.

Since coming to religious life I have had four different experiences of community living. In our congregation, we have small group arrangements within our convent and in the surrounding area. My first experience was living with our largest group. While there, I lived in a bi-level apartment with eleven other people. The gathering space was small, so to accommodate everyone comfortably many times the group divided, some sisters congregating downstairs while others met upstairs.

My current community living situation is challenging at times. After almost ten years of ministry in the Fargo-Moorhead area I was offered an opportunity to minister in Jamestown, North Dakota, working with the youth in that area. (Jamestown is 95 miles west of Fargo.) The majority of my week is spent in Fargo, living with one other sister in a house behind the convent. While in Jamestown I live with a woman who is an Associate with our community.

During our days together at the Giving Voice conference I was filled with so much joy and enthusiasm. It was wonderful to be with others who share similarities in age and experience. We recognize that we are the minority in religious life, yet we find joy in the life that we have been called to. I grew up hearing "listen to your elders" or "respect your elders." While I plan to continue to do this, I realize that if I am going to have my needs met in a healthy way, I need to share my opinions and voice my concerns as well.

These days communities are encouraged to spend time learning more about the younger generation, to learn what things younger people are interested in and how to be more inviting. The current challenge may be to have the multiple generations of religious women already present in a community share with each other, even reintroduce themselves to each other. In congre-

Currently, our congregation is having conversations about our future. Part of our discussions includes talking with the International Union of Presentation Sisters regarding the possibility of joining with them. Our conversations have given me much hope for the future. Through them, we are recognizing our connectedness with each other. My concept of community has broadened as I recognize that I am linked to the Presentation Sisters in Pakistan and India, as much as I am connected to the Presentation Sisters in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and New Windsor, New York (we are mostly all independent congregations here in the United States, except the U.S. Province of the International Union). We all follow the same foundress, Nano Nagle, who said, "There is no greater happiness than to be in union."

The Giving Voice gatherings also give me hope for the future, since I don't have many opportunities to gather with other younger women religious in Fargo. Prior to this gathering the seven Presentation sisters who came for the conference, spent time with each other. It is our opportunity to get to know one another, and to establish connections and support. In the same way, meeting everyone at the conference has been helpful, as it is also about being connected to one another.

gations where the majority of sisters are older and came into religious life together, those who came later can feel separated. It is important to share the stories of yesterday, but it is also important for members to share current stories and hope for the future.

The tools that Luisa shared with us helped me to reflect on what I need for good community living. I am especially appreciative of the reminders to stay anchored in a contemplative commitment to prayer and to connecting with others around hope, vision, the "now" and the "new". Without a commitment to prayer it is doubtful that I would feel worthy to call myself a religious any longer. Prayer and community are two of the things that have brought me to religious life and that sustain me. I am hopeful that I will be able to use these tools in a way that will benefit me and the people with whom I live.

10 MODERN TRENDS AND THEIR INVITATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY

(Based on a presentation by Maria Cimperman, OSU and Katherine Feely, SND given at the 2009 Giving Voice Conference in Milwaukee.)

Architecture

How do we use space? How do the spaces that we use contain and sustain life? Is our use of space in keeping with our values and way of life? What new ways of looking at space do we need to dream in religious life today?

Conflicts among People

How does peace keeping move to peace building? What is the challenge of reconciliation in an age of global division? Where is the Church in this age? What is the Church's role in an age of conflict? Where do we need reconciliation within our own communities? How can we be reconciling communities for others? What skills for reconciliation do we need to bring to religious life and our world today?

Divisions

What does it mean to be Church when there are divisions within the people of God? What skills do we need to develop in order to have the conversations we do not know how to have? How might we foster deeper dialogue and healing of divisions?

Economics

What kind of religious life are we being called to live in the midst of a global financial crisis, growing global poverty, etc.? What hope are we being called to bring to the world from our economic lifestyle?

Technology

How can we use technology to connect on a deeper level and to foster faith? How can religious life use technology to promote deeper relations and understandings? How are we called to model healthy and productive ways of using technology to the wider community?

Time

How do we use our time? How does it build community? Does our use of time reflect our values and priorities? How do we transform Chronos into Kairos? How do we find a new asceticism in the use of our time and in the schedules we keep? How do we honor Sabbath time?

Brain Research

How do we integrate body, mind and spirit into a wholistic way of life? What skills for wholistic living are we being called to bring to the world around us?

Climate Change

How must we change our patterns of consumption for the flourishing of the global community? How are we being called to dream and demonstrate new models of consumption for the global community?

Community Research

What forms of community are needed in the world today? How do we harness our collective wisdom and capabilities to model viable, life-giving forms of community to the world?

Finding Happiness

Where do we find happiness? What sustains us? How do we bring our joy to the world? How do we teach others to find happiness? How do we model a joyful way of life?

What other trends do you see? What are their invitations to those of us in religious life today?

MLK GATHERING 2009 TAMPA, FLORIDA



“I am 27 years old and professed my first vows this summer. Being 20 years younger than my closest sister in community and going through formation alone has been a real challenge. This was my first experience with the Giving Voice 20's and 30's group. I found a whole group of peers who are passionate about religious life and who are committed to creatively walking into the future together. We prayed, played, laughed and had great conversations. It is amazing to me how in one weekend I can feel such a flood of support, hope and energy for the future.”

- Jessi Beck, PBVM

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What has been your experience of community life? What have been the opportunities for growth? What have been the blessings?
2. What does it mean to live community rather than simply to be in community? Does this distinction shape your experience of communal living?
3. What has sustained you in living community? What are the tools that have been most helpful in your journey?
4. What are the most important lessons you have learned through living community? What have you learned through cross-generational living or through peers and mentors?
5. What are your hopes for the future, regarding living community? What gifts do you bring to that future?

If you are interested in contributing an article for the next issue please contact editor@giving-voice.org.